

Wounded Warriors: Receiving Disability Benefits And Returning To Work



If you receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits, and you are working or planning to work, it is important that you tell us about it right away.

Social Security has special rules called work incentives that allow you to test your ability to return to work and still receive monthly Social Security disability benefits. These special rules also apply to wounded warriors.

You also can get help with the education, training, and rehabilitation you need in order to work. For more information about disability benefits for wounded warriors, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov/woundedwarriors. For more information about working, go to www.socialsecurity.gov/work.

Are you staying on active duty?

You may be receiving SSA disability benefits but remain on active duty. It is important that you immediately contact Social Security if there is a change in your—

- Military Occupational Specialty code (MOS);
- Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSC); or
- Navy Enlisted Classification (NEC).

A permanent change of station (PCS) move from one duty station to another is also a potential indicator that you may be going back to work and should contact Social Security.

Changes in your work status may affect your Social Security benefits. Tell us right away about any changes in your work or active duty status.

If you are planning to change your PCS, MOS, AFSC, or NEC, you can request a Benefits Planning Query from Social Security. This query contains information about the status of your disability benefits, work history, and current work status, health insurance, scheduled medical reviews, and representative payee data.

You can use the Benefits Planning Query as a tool to help you plan your return to work. Request your query by calling **1-800-772-1213**, or visit your local field office.

What information do I need to report?

If you do take a job, it is important that you let us know about it as soon as possible. You should tell us:

- When you start or stop work; and
- If there is a change in your job duties, hours of work, or rate of pay.

Even if you are receiving full pay, you may still qualify for Social Security disability benefits.

How do I report my work activity?

You may visit your local field office to report your current work activity. You can find the closest office on our website at www.socialsecurity.gov.

Ask the Social Security representative to give you a receipt showing that you reported your work activity. The work report receipt is for your records, and serves as proof that you told us about your current work situation.

What happens next?

When we receive notification that you have returned to work, we perform a work continuing disability review (CDR). During this review we look to see whether you are working and have substantial earnings. For 2011, monthly earnings over \$1,000 (\$1,640 if you are blind) are considered “substantial.” That amount changes each year. When we conduct a work CDR, we ask you to complete an SSA-821-BK (Work Activity Report-Employee). It is important that you complete the form in its entirety and provide as much detail as possible about your job duties.

It is important that you tell us whether you are in a designated work therapy program or whether you are assigned limited duty because of your disability. You may be receiving full military pay, but not performing work duties. Without this information, we cannot properly evaluate your work, and your Social Security benefits may be suspended or terminated.

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What are the work incentives?

Trial Work Period (TWP)

The TWP allows you to test your ability to work for at least nine months. The months do not need to be consecutive. During your TWP, you will receive your full Social Security benefits, regardless of how much you earn, as long as you report your work activity and you continue to have a disabling impairment.

In 2011, a trial work month is any month in which your total earnings are more than \$720, or, if you are self-employed, you earn more than \$720 (after expenses) or spend more than 80 hours in your own business. The TWP continues until you have worked nine trial work months within a 60-month period.

Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE)

After the TWP ends, you have 36 months during which you can work and still receive benefits for any month that your earnings are not “substantial” (see page 1).

During the EPE, your benefits are suspended for any month that you have substantial earnings. However, you will receive a benefit for any month your earnings fall below the substantial level. No new application or disability determination is needed for you to receive a Social Security disability benefit during the EPE.

More information on work incentives is available at www.socialsecurity.gov/redbook.

Are there other programs that can help me return to work?

Ticket to Work Program

Social Security’s Ticket to Work program offers many supports that can help you return to work. Under the Ticket program, you can obtain vocational rehabilitation, training, job referrals, and other employment support services free of charge. These services are provided by Employment Networks, which are private organizations or government agencies

(state or local) that have contracts with Social Security to provide employment services and other supports to beneficiaries with disabilities.

If you are interested in using the Ticket program to go to work or get vocational services, please call **1-866-968-7842**, toll-free.

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance program

The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program is a nationwide network of community-based organizations with experts who can answer questions about Social Security’s work incentives and help you make a decision about working.

WIPA experts, called Community Work Incentive Coordinators, provide information and work incentives planning and assistance to people who are receiving Social Security disability benefits and who are currently working or considering work. They can help you understand how work affects your disability benefits and explain what other federal, state and local supports there are for people with disabilities who want to work.

To locate the WIPA project nearest you, call **1-866-968-7842**, toll free.

Contacting Social Security

For more information and to find copies of our publications, visit our website at www.socialsecurity.gov or call toll-free, **1-800-772-1213** (for the deaf or hard of hearing, call our TTY number, **1-800-325-0778**). We treat all calls confidentially. We can answer specific questions from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Friday. We can provide information by automated phone service 24 hours a day.

We also want to make sure you receive accurate and courteous service. That is why we have a second Social Security representative monitor some telephone calls.